

Romanov Yu. A., Snegurova T. A., Paramonova V. Yu.
National technical university Kharkov Polytechnic Institute
Kharkov, Ukraine
e-mail: yu.aleks63@gmail.com,
tatianasneg191@gmail.com, parle19@ukr.net

Distance course “Debut” for teaching and learning Russian as a foreign language

The development of a distance course in Russian as a foreign language for English-speaking students was carried out on the platform of the National Technical University “Kharkov Polytechnic Institute” in the Moodle environment [1–2].

This development required the definition of a target group of students, as well as the preparation of a schedule of studies with a detailed step-by-step instruction for the implementation of training activities, and the corresponding scoring scale.

The distance course, addressed to foreign students, beginning to study the Russian language for the first time, includes materials that provide students with basic knowledge and skills in Russian reading, speaking and writing up to the A2 level according to the language descriptor of the Council of Europe. The course is intended for a wide range of students studying Russian with various purposes (living and studying in countries where Russian is spoken, short-term Russian language courses, internship, academic credits in foreign (Russian) language, etc.). The duration of the course is 8 weeks.

The distance course consists of a presentation part and 8 lessons. The presentation part includes: a news forum; presentation of the course; instruction on how to work with the course; student profile; information about authors; glossary of the course; course forum; presentation of Russian idioms selected for each of the lessons of the course. The topics of the lessons are as follows: Lesson 1. The Russian Alphabet; Lesson 2. Greetings. Introductions; Lesson 3. Getting Acquainted. Introductions; Lesson 4. Professions; Lesson 5. Do you speak Russian?; Lesson 6. If you got ill...; Lesson 7. In a cafe; Lesson 8. Getting around the city. Each lesson is provided with a brief annotation on what language skills the students will acquire after working with the presented materials, for example: “after having this class you’ll get acquainted with printed and handwritten letters of the Russian Alphabet, and you’ll be able to read and write good Russian”; “after having this class you’ll be able to greet people and make introductions”; “after having this class you’ll be able to introduce yourself as a professional and speak about the place you work”, etc.).

The structure of Lesson 1 (The Russian Alphabet) includes: a working plan for the week; 4 tasks; a lesson forum participation in which provides students with the opportunity to discuss problems arising in the study of lesson materials and to receive the tutor’s answers to their questions.

The working plan for the week (Table 1) gives clear instructions on what training activities should be done every day while working on each task of the lesson.

Table 1. Working plan (week 1)

Day	Tasks	What you do	Points
Day 1	Listen to the recording, point to each letter, say its name, and pronounce the sound it gives, as in the example.	Do the task and send us the recording of your reading.	10
Days 2	Watch the video to write Russian letters	Write the letters and send us	20

and 3	correctly.	the pictures of your handwriting.	
Day 4	Watch the video, point to the letters, say, and learn the rhyme.	Do the task and send us the recording of your rhyme saying.	20
Days 5, 6, and 7	Do your phonetic drill.	Do the task and send us the recording of your reading.	40
Any	Take part in the Forum.	Download the Forum.	10

In particular, when performing the first task of the lesson (Day 1), students are introduced to the image of printed and handwritten letters of the Russian alphabet, listen to the names of each of the letters, as well as the sounds they give. Each student is required to send a file with a recording of his/her own reading of the Russian alphabet according to the sample: “Буква “а” – звук [а:], буква “б” – звук [б]...” This file will be received, checked and evaluated by the teacher (in the formulation of the assignment, the size of the file sent, the time of the checking, and the maximum score in points, that can be obtained, are necessarily indicated).

When doing the second task (Days 2 and 3) students watch the video (which serves as a training simulator) and train the skills of correct spelling of Russian handwritten letters. To check and evaluate the acquired skills, students are required to send the teacher files with images of Russian letters written by them.

The third task (Day 4) involves memorizing of the Russian alphabet in the form of a pronunciation, which is achieved by viewing the corresponding video. Students are required to send their own audio recordings.

In the fourth task (Days 5, 6 and 7), it is presented the training simulator, working with which provides the necessary phonetic training and improvement of Russian pronunciation skills among students. To monitor the performance of the assignment by the teacher and score the points, students are also required to send files with audio recordings. The maximum score is 100 for each lesson.

The structure of Lessons 2–8 is identical and includes the following elements: a working plan for the week; vocabulary of the lesson with translation into English and sound recording; dialogues in which the presented vocabulary is realized (also with translation and sounding); grammatical section with an explanation of the occurring grammatical phenomena; exercises for training of grammatical skills; Russian-English glossary; forum of the lesson.a.

The working plan and the grammar section of the lesson are created in the form of a “Page” module, which provides greater availability of the resource (for example, for mobile device users) and ease in its updating; other elements of the structure (except for the glossary and the forum) are presented in the form of the learning element “Task”, allowing to collect students’ works, to evaluate them and to provide the feedback.

Part of the grammar exercises is performed in the form of tests. Such a course element as “Test” makes it possible to create tests consisting of different types of questions: correspondence, multiple choice, “true” / “false”, short answer, etc. Since this distance course is intended for students of the initial stage of training, the tests provided the possibility of their taking with an unlimited number of attempts. To exclude the possibility of right answers “memorizing”, the order of the questions is mixed every time, and they are selected from the bank of questions in a random order. Each student's attempt to pass the test is evaluated automatically, and the learner receives an appropriate evaluation according to the estimated scale in the test.

The use of distance course for learning Russian as a foreign language “Debut” (also available a printed edition with links to the podcast [3]) provides the following opportunities: attraction of the international students to study at a university in Russian and, to a certain extent, provision of their initial language training before coming to the country of the studied

language; diversity of educational process for already existing students by creating them proper conditions for their independent work; possibility to obtain the necessary academic credits in Russian for those students who, because of various reasons, cannot come for full-time study.

References:

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